Proviſion for Eternity the beſt Uſe we can make of a ſhort and uncertain Life.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. *Martin*'s Church in the City of *Oxford*,

Before the

MAYOR and CORPORATION,

On Sunday November the 4th, 1759.

Being the Day of the Interment of

THOMAS ROWNEY, Eſq;

One of their late Worthy Repreſentatives in Parliament.

By JOHN BILSTONE, M.A.

Chaplain of ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the MAYOR and CORPORATION, and other Auditors.

OXFORD,

Printed for S. PARKER in the High-Street: And Sold by D. PRICE in OXFORD; and J. RIVINGTON in St. Paul's Church Yard.

SERMON

Preached at

St. Mary's Church in the City of Oxford

before the

MAYOR and CORPORATION,

On Sunday November the 4th, 1753.

Being the Anniversary of

THOMAS [illegible] ESQ;

One of their Worthy Representatives in Parliament.

BRITISH MUSEUM

By JOHN RILSTONE, M.A.

Chaplain of Alls Souls College, Oxford.

Published at the Request of the MAYOR and CORPORATION, and other Auditors.

OXFORD.

Printed for S. PARKER in the High-Street; And Sold by D[illegible] in Oxford; and J. NEWBERY in St. Paul's Church Yard.

TO THE

Right Worſhipful the *Mayor*,

The Worſhipful

Sir *James D'Aſhwood*, Bart. High-Steward,

The Worſhipful the *Recorder*, and *Aldermen*,

The *Aſſiſtants* and *Bailiffs*,

With the reſt of the Antient and Loyal

CORPORATION of OXFORD,

The following Diſcourſe, publiſhed at their Requeſt, on the Death of their late worthy Repreſentative in Parliament, THOMAS ROWNEY, Eſq; is moſt humbly inſcribed

By their obliged,

Humble Servant,

JOHN BILSTONE.

BRITISH MUSEUM

I. CHRON. 29, 15.

We are Strangers before thee, and Sojourners, as were all our Fathers: Our Days on the Earth are as a Shadow, and there is no Abiding.

DAVID's paſſionate Zeal for the Magnificence of that Temple, which God had determined ſhould be built by Solomon his Son, occaſioned the Remark in the Words of the Text, and ſtands recorded to his Honour in Scripture. Full of Old-age, and abounding in Wealth, he would not however be debarred the Pleaſure of contributing towards it, and accordingly appropriated a very conſiderable Part of his Treaſure to make it a proper Reception for the King of Glory, and to adorn it with ſuch Beauty as became a Place of ſuch awful Solemnity.

In Submiſſion to the Divine Will he exhorted his Son punctually to build the Sanctuary of the Lord, agreeable to that Model, which he himſelf had deſigned, and which, with a liberal Beneficence he had greatly encouraged. *Who then is willing to conſecrate his Service this Day unto the Lord?* was a prevailing Invitation, and raiſed a noble Emulation in his mighty Men. *The Princes of the Tribes of Iſrael, the Chief of the Fathers, and the Captains of Thouſands* were animated by it with Zeal, and *offered willingly.*

Thanks to the God of Heaven, was the Produce of that Pleaſure which affected him at the Peoples offering with a chearful Mind; and the divine Condeſcention gave Life to his Devotion, in accepting thoſe Oblations as Preſents to himſelf, which were the voluntary Loans of his own Bounty. And thus he introduces the Confeſſion in the Text, — "For "we are Strangers before thee, and Sojourners, "as all our Fathers were." We cannot pretend to claim any Thing as our own; becauſe this lower World is not the proper Place of

our Abode. We are only Paſſengers journeying in Haſte to another Country; our Days on the Earth are as a Shadow, and there is no Abiding. Or (as the Words may be rendered) there is no Expectation of living here as in our continuing City, or of having any laſting Enjoyment in it.

THIS being the Scope and Deſign of the Words, I ſhall,

Firſt, SHEW that we are to conſider ourſelves as Strangers and Sojourners here, and to remember that the Things which we poſſeſs belong unto God, by an unalienable Right, and are only lent us as Accommodations in our Paſſage through this World.

Secondly, THAT we are deſigned for another State, and ſhould therefore make our Improvement of thoſe Days upon Earth, which are as a Shadow. —— And,

Laſtly, THAT we ſhould fix our Expectations upon, and carefully provide for a future

future Life; — as this preſent one is only the Way to it, and *that* other the eternal Place of our Abode.

During the Primitive Ages of the World, before Life was contracted into the narrow Limits of Threeſcore Years and Ten, and when Fourſcore were ſurmounted without the Complaint of Labour and Sorrow, this however was the general Voice, that we were here no more than Pilgrims, and that the Days of our Pilgrimage were but few. And in order to keep them mindful of their ſhort and inconſtant Condition in this Life, they were ſuffered to be carried about from one Nation to another, from one Kingdom to another People.

That the Father of the Faithful might not be tempted to ſet his Heart on that delightful Country, which was given to *him*, and his Seed after him, he ſojourned in the Land of Promiſe, as in a ſtrange Country: He left his Father's Houſe, and dwelt in Tabernacles, looking for a City, whoſe Foundation was better than this World can yield,

and

and whoſe Maker and Builder was the Supreme God.

THESE were the Sentiments which the Patriarchs entertained of earthly Life, and what we, if we would make a pertinent Uſe of it, muſt not in any Degree diſregard or deſpiſe. Duty and Decency are to be the Standards of our Conduct: It will be prudent to conſider *why* we were made; and when our Enquiries are ſatisfied in that Particular, a proper Application of our Time will be no mean Part of our Wiſdom.

THAT Life is but ſhort is a vulgar Complaint, and not ſeldom the Voice of the Infidel. That the Span of our Exiſtence in this World is of too contracted a Nature for a plenary Enjoyment of the Bleſſings of it is a ſurprizing Tenet: It muſt be founded on a falſe Judgment, and only eſpouſed by the Babblers, and wiſe Men after the Fleſh.

THAT Life is ſhort is the Voice of Nature, but that it is not long enough is the Outcry

of

of a Fool. Too much of it is consumed in idle Amusements, Sloth and Negligence waste more, and was that Portion well applied, which is squandered away in Debauchery, there would be no Foundation for so irrational a Complaint.

A longer Life might gratify the sensual Desires of a Man, and make him a more conspicuous Brute: The Sot might repeat his Intemperance indeed the oftener, and the Glutton obtain a longer Lease for Indulgence. But this sure can never be esteemed any Part of human Happiness. It is but treading the same Round of Folly; an Entertainment beneath the Desire of a wise Man; the Repetition of which must create a *Nausea*, or at least be unsatisfactory, as superfluous.

Our Time, if not wasted in Trifles, or consumed in Sin, will be long enough for the Business assigned us by God. There is a very pertinent Rebuke in *Seneca*, though a Heathen Moralist, which ought to correct the Folly of many ridiculous Christians: "Ye live (says he) "as if Life was never to have an End. The

"Frailty

"Frailty of your Nature is never thought of;
"or if it be, it is remembered to no Purpoſe.
"For at the ſame Time that your Fears are
"infinite, which prove you mortal, your De-
"ſires are likewiſe infinite, as though you
"looked upon yourſelves to be immortal."

PROPER Reflections on our ſhort Continuance here, would animate our Endeavours to provide for hereafter: The Unſatisfactorineſs of worldly Pleaſures would give us a Diſtaſte to them, and an ingenuous Mind would be more delighted with it's Expectation of Heaven, than the greateſt Indulgence could afford us on Earth. We ſhould then remember that we are dependent Beings, and ignorant of the Time of our Departure hence. Which very Uncertainty would be a conſiderable Motive to uſe this World as not abuſing it, and would take off the Edge of our Affections for it's Enjoyments.

THE Want of this neceſſary Thought of our Dependency, I am afraid, too often gives Birth to our violent Fondneſs for tranſitory

Pleaſures. A ſerious Recollection that Death was as certain as our Exiſtence, and that our Summons might approach even whilſt we were thinking of it, muſt aſſuredly blunt our Affections for Things below: And how we ſhould ſtand before an all-knowing God, would more reaſonably be the Subject of our Care and Enquiry. The Talents we are entruſted with, we ſhould conſider as God's, and we ſhould improve them agreeable to his Divine Appointment.

We have nothing, which with any Propriety we can call our own; we ourſelves, as Men, are Creatures formed by the Hand of the Almighty, and, as Chriſtians, we are Servants bought with a Price. We ſhould therefore glorify our Maker both with Body and Soul, and with that Affluence, which he is pleaſed to lend us for our Accomodations through Life. Our Reaſon and our Religion both point out to us our abſolute Incapacity of preſerving ourſelves, that none but the ſupreme Being can prolong our Lives, and that the moſt exact Care, and the moſt vigilant Circumſpection,

are no Securities againſt Diſorders or Death. The Earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it; and the very Breath of our Noſtrils may be recalled from us at Pleaſure.

Such Sentiments as theſe are becoming a Chriſtian, and a charitable Diſtribution of our earthly Bleſſings, the beſt Arguments of human Wiſdom. And that we are deſigned for another State, and ſhould therefore make ſuch Improvement of thoſe Days upon Earth, which are as a Shadow, was the

Second Thing I propoſed to remind you of.

The great Uncertainty of Earthly Enjoyments, one would imagine, was ſufficient to correct all inordinate Fondneſs of them; and yet we find the Generality of Mankind ſtupidly devoted to their bewitching Charms. Religion, the moſt momentous Buſineſs of a rational Creature, is too much ſet aſide as an Enemy to the Gratification of Appetite; and a Judgment to come, how tremendous ſoever, is ſo little regarded, as to be made the Paſtime

of our modern, faſhionable Debauchees. It is good for them, they conceive, to be here; this is their Dwelling, and they delight therein.

But have they no Underſtanding, that they are ſuch Workers of Iniquity? Are they altogether become abominable in their Doings; and can they hope to live here for ever? Are theſe the Men, who have Riches in Poſſeſſion, and under ſo great an Obligation to God for their Affluence, who make ſuch ſmall Returns of Reverence, and ſo ungratefully requite the Bounty of Heaven?

These are the Preſumptuous, Heady, High Minded, who ſay, "We are they who ought "to ſpeak, who is Lord over Us?" Unthinking Creatures! loſt to all ſenſe of Goodneſs, and void of every Degree of Shame! Pampered Rebels, who bid Defiance to Omnipotence; who fatten upon God's Bounty, and kick at their Benefactor.

But let me paſs to a more pleaſing Scene, and ſurvey the Man, whoſe Views extend to much

much better Things, and whoſe Taſte is not ſo baſe and degenerate. He juſtly eſtimates the Value of Life; improves the Bleſſings of it to Advantage, and makes it his chief Study to learn to live. Death, he knows, is the unavoidable Portion of Man: The Wicked in this Life often flouriſh, and come in no Misfortune like other Men. He wiſely concludes therefore, that a God of infinite Juſtice cannot ſuffer the Wicked to go always unpuniſhed, nor his faithful Servants unrewarded. How natural therefore is his Reaſoning, and his Concluſion juſt?—"Verily there is a Re-"ward for the Righteous; doubtleſs there is "a God that judgeth the Earth."

Upon this Principle he forms his Conduct. His Enquiry is prudent to know why he was placed in this preſent World, and what will become of him in another. He looks upon Life as a Matter of the utmoſt Importance: By a proper Management of it, he makes it eaſy and uſeful; and, as our Days here are but as a Shadow, Godlineſs of Life he deems the beſt Improvement of them.

Thus

THUS he conſecrates his Time to Devotion and Duty in every Shape. To his God he is grateful for the daily Mercies he receives, and to the Poor and Needy he forgets not to communicate. His Talents, thus managed, will yield him ample Increaſe: Charity is a noble Emulation, and Beneficence is the cloſeſt Copy which Man is capable of making of the Divinity of God. The Dictates of Nature furniſh us with Arguments in it's Behalf, and the inward Pleaſure flowing from it, is not only *Encouragement* but *Reward*.

LET theſe Things be our Delight; 'tis the beſt Buſineſs we can follow in Life; and as we are deſigned for another State, Vertue will conduct us moſt ſafely to our Felicity. And ſince this preſent is only the Way to a future Life, which will be the Place of our Abiding for ever, Let us therefore

Thirdly, Fix our Expectations thereon, and make a proper Proviſion for it.

THE World, (like the Prince of it) to every one's Sorrow, proved a Liar from the Beginning.

Beginning. It promiſes Pleaſures, but they prove deceitful. The Gratification of Appetite is unſatisfactory, and the Felicity of the Epicure terminates in a Surfeit. Our Poſſeſſions are often large, without much Enjoyment, and our Souls are frequently empty, when our Treaſuries are full.

I ONLY mention this to ſhew the Abſurdity of placing our Affections here, where Diſappointment is our Sovereign; is about our Path and about our Bed, and continually attending us in all our Ways. And yet ſo great is our Stupidity that we are fond of the Deluſion, and fancy that *that* Happineſs (which has hitherto eſcaped us) will one Day be ſteady to our Wiſhes, and certainly be confined within the Circle of our Embraces. Thus we proceed in Dream and Fiction; ſpend our Time in projecting Models of a viſionary Felicity, and at laſt are rewarded with our old Diſappointment.

BUT would not a thinking Man aſk himſelf this reaſonable Queſtion,—Is there any Thing

in

in Deluſion ſo taking and lovely, as to be worth our ſeeking at the Expence of true Wiſdom? 'Tis beneath the Dignity of Reaſon to hunt after Contentment in Elyſian Proſpects, Dreams of Happineſs, or Landſcapes of Paradiſe. It would be a better Part of our Character to make Proviſion for Eternity, that glorious State of the Bleſſed hereafter, than to be thus ſedulous in contriving Steps to a bare ſpeculative Felicity. Half the Time would make us wiſe unto Salvation, which we conſume in the Purſuit of Shadow and Impoſture.

So that if this preſent Life abounds with nothing but Uncertainty, and the whole World reſembles in Vanity the Chaos in Confuſion, we may be ſure God deſigned us for another World, from that very Diſſatisfaction which we find in this. For had our Lot fallen to dwell in this preſent Life only, God would undoubtedly have adapted our Capacities to the ſcanty Meaſure of theſe earthly Objects, and not thought it worthy himſelf to bring Creatures, but little lower than Angels, into ſo tranſitory and uncertain a Place. So that, from the very

Vanity

Vanity of Life we have no mean Argument for a future State, which is the moſt prevailing Motive to the Practice of Religion and the Duty of Repentance.

A REASONABLE Perſon cannot dwell long upon the Conſideration of another World, where Vertue and Vice will moſt ſtrictly and juſtly find their reſpective Recompence, without creating a ſerious Attention, and raiſing a real Concern in himſelf about it. Our Hope and our Fear will be ſurpriſingly affected, and be apt to inſpire us with Reſolution to forſake the Deluſions of this Scene of Vanity. And happy would it be, if they had a general Influence, and taught the whole Race ſo to number their Days (which are but as a Shadow) that they might be brought to apply their Hearts unto Wiſdom.

IT is really ſurpriſing how Men endowed with Reaſon, can doat ſo ſtupidly on what they ſee attended with Fickleneſs and Inconſtancy. All the Poſſeſſions of the Earth are not a ſufficient Remedy againſt Pain; nor ca-

pable

pable of ſkreening us againſt the unwelcome Intruſion of accidental Diſorders. Our Treaſuries may abound, and our Reſolutions of Indulgence be violent and ſtrong, yet ſtill we muſt know there is no Inſurance from the Grave: Our *Epicurean* Dreams may be ſuddenly interrupted, and, inſtead of Enjoyment, Diſappointment may be our Fortune.

The Envy, the Ill-nature, and the Malice of Mankind, may poſſibly withold their Hands from doing us any Injury, or diſturbing our Peace; but even this Immunity is not ſatisfactory; the Thread of Life is of a very fine and tender Contexture; ſevered in a Moment by the Scythe of Death, and then where is all our Earthly Felicity?

But without contemplating the Scenes of Miſery which we are forced to go through, or pining at the Shortneſs and Viciſſitudes of Life, it would be a more commendable Employment to make ſuch Reflections inſtrumental in the Promotion of our eternal Happineſs. And as the Days of our abiding here are but

as

as a Shadow, few and tranſitory, what more proper Uſe can we make of them, than begging of God to inſtruct us in the Knowledge of our End, that we may make that Application to our Duty, which will enable us to receive Death with Comfort, tho' it ſhould cut us off without the leaſt Notice. But,

Laſtly, FROM the Care and Trouble, and from the Uncertainty of Life, we have great Reaſon, I think, to diſſuade ourſelves from a criminal Fondneſs of it, and to lay aſide thoſe great Expectations from it, which, from a Sort of Vanity in ourſelves, we are too prone to entertain of it's Enjoyments. Even Friendſhip and Honour, from whence one might hope to receive ſome Satisfaction, too often prove unfaithful to us. The human Mind is very fickle and inconſtant; and that which is pleaſing and admired To-day, To-morrow proves flat, inſipid, or loathſome. Let us therefore betake ourſelves to that eternal Truth, where there is no Variableneſs nor Shadow of Turning.

THESE

These Reflections on the Shortneſs and Uncertainty of human Life, naturally claim a Word or two, by Way of Concluſion, on the melancholly and ſudden Loſs of one truly amiable, and whoſe Memory muſt be for ever dear to the Members of this Community: In the Midſt of Health ſnatched from his Friends! In the Enjoyment of innocent Pleaſure, with the honeſt View of preſerving Health, was the Joy of this Place hurried away; lament, all ye Iſraelites, the irreparable Loſs of this your *Samuel*.

Some Foibles human Nature in it's corrupted State cannot be abſolutely exempted from. A Man cannot be perfect as his Maker; and the moſt ſhining Character may be ſullied with ſome ſmall Blemiſhes.

But this will never juſtify human Cenſure. Correction of ourſelves is a more commendable Diſcipline, and cleanſing our own Corruption, before we throw a Stone at our Neighbour, would be an effectual Cure of all Malevolence and Abuſe. But the Converſation

and

and Conduct of our *loſt Friend* is the beſt Armour againſt Scandal in every Shape. In his publick Worſhip of the *Deity*, he was remarkably conſtant and ſerious; to his *Sovereign* dutiful, and to his *Country* faithful.

If undiſſembled Friendſhip, and unrivalled Hoſpitality can claim any Share of human Affection, the Members of this loyal City may reaſonably cloathe themſelves in ſable, and bow down heavily as one that mourneth for a Parent.——If Publick-Spiritedneſs deſerves human Applauſe, and the Love of our Country be either a commendable or diſtinguiſhing Character, the whole *County* Concern muſt be great and exemplary for the Loſs of a *Patriot*, who had no clandeſtine Views to gratify, and the magnificent Monuments of whoſe Generoſity cannot be concealed from the Eyes of Mankind.

If extenſive Charity, not proclaimed by the Phariſaical Trumpet of Vanity and Oſtentation, be any mark of a Chriſtian Spirit, or Chriſtian Beneficence, pour out your Lamentations, ye Sons and Daughters of Poverty and Affliction:

Let

Let the Widow's Head be a Fountain of Waters, and the poor Orphans Cheeks ſwim in Tears, and their Hearts be cloathed in real Sorrow. The Poor had no Occaſion to cry unto *him*, and the Fatherleſs could not ſay, he had none to help him. His ſtudied Secrecy was no mean Part of his Beneficence, and Numbers were cheriſhed without knowing their Benefactor. To the Friendleſs he was a Father, and like the good Samaritan he poured in his Oil and Wine, and drew forth his Soul to ſatisfy the Miſerable.

In ſhort: If good Nature and good Manners can merit Eſteem, and giving to the Poor be lending to the Lord, tho' our Loſs be great, and Sorrow unavoidable, yet this may adminiſter ſome Comfort unto us, that we have reaſonable Hope, ſuch exemplary Vertues muſt meet with divine Approbation, and "well done good and "faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of "thy Lord," be the happy Sentence pronounced on him hereafter, by a God of Infinite Juſtice and Mercy.

7 DE 65

FINIS.